

# News From The States

# EVENING WRAP

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By [Kate Queram](#)

I'm shifting back to non-election mode, which sounds very official but really just means we're talking government more than politics. Is this different, you ask? Yes and no. They're both dysfunctional, but at least government occasionally gets things done. Unfortunately, it also gets a lot of things wrong.



## The Big Takeaway

Nationwide, there are [more than 391,000](#) children and teens in foster care. Those programs, which place children [in temporary care](#) when their parents can't (or won't) care for them, are administered at the state level, with varying degrees of success. ([States](#) with restrictive abortion laws, for example, place [higher numbers](#) of children in foster care, particularly children of color.) As a whole, the system is plagued with chronic problems, most stemming from [underinvestment](#) that leaves agencies with [too few employees](#) overseeing [too many cases](#) with [too few foster homes](#) to accommodate them.



*A comparatively light caseload.  
(Photo by MP Studio/Adobe Stock)*

**The chaotic churn makes it nearly impossible for states to protect the children in their care.** Tens of thousands simply disappear from the system, despite safeguards designed specifically to prevent kids from falling through the cracks. From July 2018 through December 2020, state agencies failed to report an estimated 38,469 cases of missing foster kids in direct violation of [federal law](#), according to an audit published this year by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The [average age](#) was 15, which experts said was unsurprising. The system isn't built to accommodate teenagers, [they told Stateline](#).

“When it comes to teenagers specifically, most child welfare systems just don’t have the right service array, because systems are often built for babies and younger children,” said consultant and attorney Lisa Pilnik, director of Child & Family Policy Associates, a child welfare consulting and research firm. “We don’t have enough family placements, and we don’t have family placements that are equipped to meet the needs of teenagers.”

**Teens often run away** or go missing more than once during their time in foster care. Around 40% of foster children who were reported missing had disappeared multiple times (four, on average) under the state’s watch. A disproportionate number of missing kids are [Black and Native American](#) children, who are [more likely to be removed](#) from their homes due in part to racial bias. Nationwide, the system “is wrought with a lot of difficulties,” said Gaétane Borders, president of

Peas In Their Pods, a nonprofit that advocates for missing children of color.



*Puzzling.*

*(Photo by Johnner Images/Getty Images)*

**It's not much better at the state level.** Nearly a thousand children went missing from Missouri's foster care system [in 2019](#); nearly half went unreported. In Georgia, 1,790 foster children went missing between 2018 and 2022, according to [an analysis](#) compiled as part of an [ongoing congressional investigation](#). More than 20% of those were likely trafficked, [the Georgia Recorder reported](#).

“When children are then placed in foster homes or group homes that don't have the resources, training, or support necessary to meet their needs for love, belonging, and self-exploration, running away from these placements often becomes their effort to problem solve to meet these needs,” said Samantha Sahl, supervisor of the child sex trafficking recovery services Team for the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

“This creates a perfect storm that traffickers are skilled at taking advantage of,” she added. “We know we have an urgent issue when children feel better on the streets or with a trafficker than they do in their foster care placements.”

Lawyers for the Georgia Division of Family & Children Services had [previously accused](#) the subcommittee of airing “misstatements, omissions” and failing “to request relevant information or responses” from the state “in advance of its publicized hearings and press conferences,” leaving the “unfortunate impression that the goals of this investigation are political.” Still, the division “takes seriously the issue of missing or runaway children,” they wrote, which is outlined in “14-page policy memo providing detailed instructions to DFCS case workers on how to handle reported missing children.”

The agency will “advocate for changes in state law” to “further bolster” its practices, attorneys added.



*Pomp and circumstance.  
(Photo by Getty Images)*

**Undergraduate students with children could get a boost** under a proposed U.S. House bill, which would require the Department of Education to research ways to improve graduation rates for college and university students who are also parents or caregivers. Nationwide, around 22% of undergraduates are also parents. Statistically, more than half will drop out within six years before obtaining a degree, [NC Newsline reported](#).

The bill, filed Thursday, is a pet project for U.S. Rep. Deborah Ross (D-.N.C.),

who has spent “decades” trying to make education more accessible for young parents.

“Initially, I worked on it for pregnant and parenting high school students who were being put out of school,” Ross said. “Here we have kids who are going to have babies and people are trying to make it so they can’t finish high school. Then I worked on trying to get more child care facilities at community college. And then here in Congress we’ve learned that more than 20 percent of people getting a college degree are pregnant or parenting. And they have lower graduation rates. So this is a problem basically from adolescence on.”

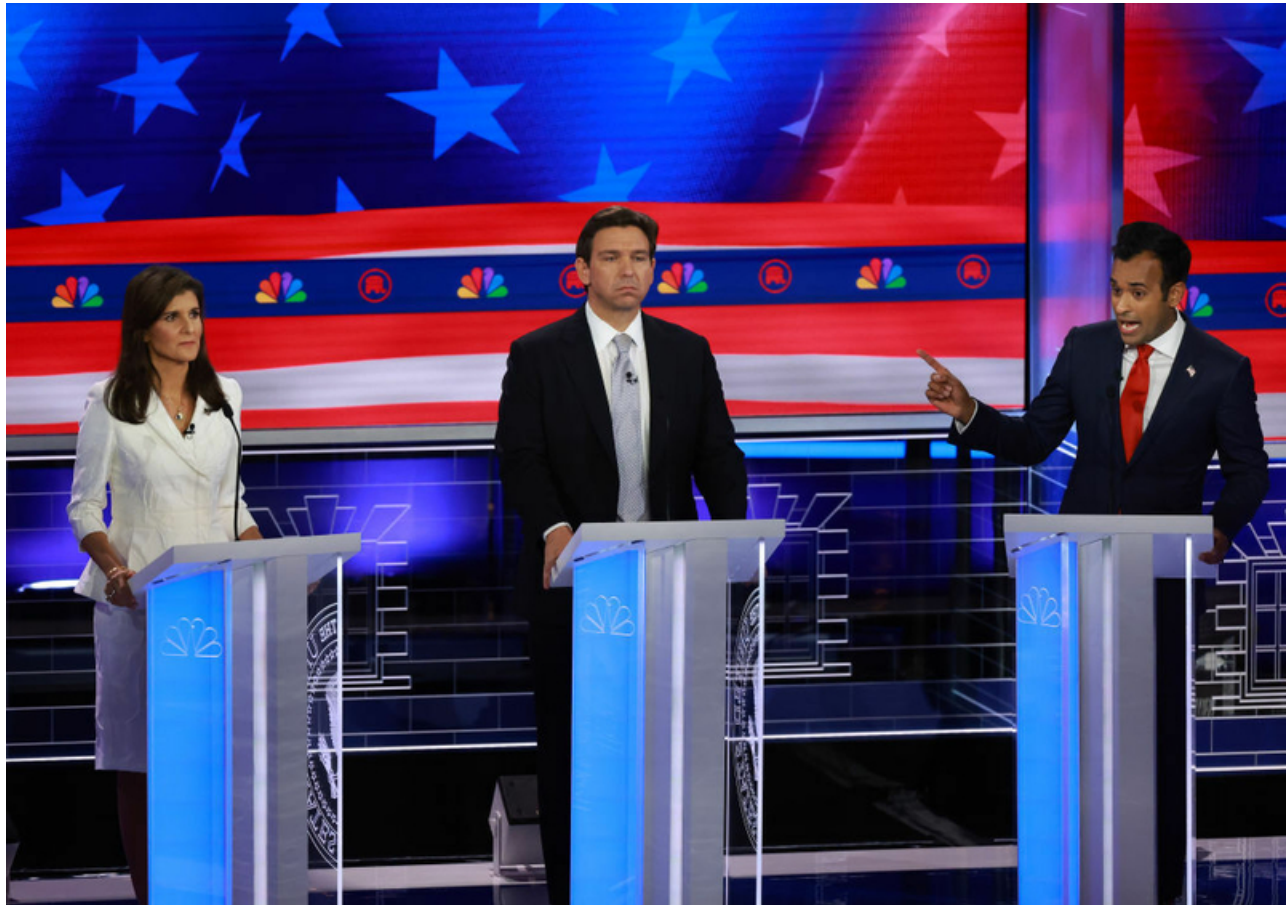
The barriers are particularly daunting for lower-income parents, who are trying to further their education while also struggling to pay for tuition on top of basic expenses. For those students, the cost of child care is often an insurmountable obstacle, Ross said.

“We want higher education and community college to be something that helps raise people’s standards of living,” Ross said. “It’s kind of a double whammy if you’re already lower income and you’re trying to get that education and you have this additional expense.”

**Double whammies:** [Kansas issues grants of \\$10.2 million to expand child care in Lawrence, Hays and Emporia ...](#) [Infant mortality fell in Kentucky in 2022 while increasing nationally ...](#) [Louisiana adopts paid family leave for 70,000 state workers ...](#) [More than 52,000 kids were kicked off Missouri Medicaid from June to September ...](#) [Montana to accept federal funds to feed school-aged children next summer ...](#) [Nebraska civil rights panel examines COVID-19 impacts on youth mental health ...](#) [Bill to ban gender-affirming surgeries for minors spurs pushback from New Hampshire parents, providers ...](#) [New drug to protect young children from common respiratory infection in short supply ...](#) [The Lost Children: Overrepresentation of Native American children in the South Dakota foster care system ...](#) [Appeals court considers whether Texas teens should be allowed contraception without parental consent under federal program ...](#) [Sex trafficking, drugs and assault: Texas foster kids and caseworkers face chaos in rental houses and hotels ...](#) [Leading foster care reform advocate leaving West Virginia because she can’t get services for adopted son](#)



Five of the GOP's six remaining presidential hopefuls gathered in Miami Wednesday to debate foreign policy, talk about shoes and do their very best to avoid insulting Donald Trump, the [42-point frontrunner](#) they're all ostensibly trying to defeat, [our D.C. bureau reported](#). This is partly a problem of logistics — you can't debate someone who skips the debate to hold a rally down the road — but it's also a political calculation. Republicans can't win the nomination without the MAGA faithful, and the MAGA faithful do not take kindly to people who disparage Trump.



*HAVING A BLAST WISH YOU WERE HERE  
(Photo by Joe Raedle/Getty Images)*

**Which makes this debate (all of these debates) mostly meaningless.** Absent a common enemy, the five — Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, former United Nations ambassador Nikki Haley, biotech bro Vivek Ramaswamy, former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, and U.S. Sen. Tim Scott (R-S.C.) — turned on each other. Some arguments stemmed from disagreements on policy, like how to address antisemitism on college campuses or how (or whether) to send more aid to Ukraine.

But others were deeply personal. Ramaswamy took aim at Haley, disparaging her foreign policy chops and calling her “Dick Cheney in three-inch heels.” Haley shrugged it off — “They’re five-inch heels, and they’re not a fashion statement. They’re for ammunition.” — but was far less composed after his second attack, which focused, bizarrely, on her daughter’s use of TikTok.

“Leave my daughter out of your voice,” she said, adding, somewhat incredulously, “You’re just scum.”

**Fifteen miles down the road, Trump held his own version of a debate,** by which I mean he rambled and ranted to a crowd of supporters and then tried to frame that as more difficult than dissecting policy with other presidential candidates on live television.

“Somebody said, one of those dumber ones, ‘He doesn’t have the courage to stand up’ – Well, listen, I’m standing in front of tens of thousands of people right now, and it’s on television,” Trump said. “That’s a hell of a lot harder to do than a debate.”

**The rest of the rally followed the predictable script.** President Joe Biden and the “radical left Democrats” stole the 2020 election from Trump. He “won’t allow” them to do it in 2024. Biden can’t possibly win a fair election, what with inflation and the “open borders.” If Democrats win this election, the “power in America” will belong to them “forever.” (Blah blah blah.) But he did manage to stumble upon at least one truth: The Republican primary debates are really just kind of awful.

“They’re not watchable,” he said. “You know, the last debate was the lowest-rated debate in the history of politics, so therefore do you think we did the right thing by not participating?”

The crowd, as it always does, cheered.

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## One Last Thing

Dinkinesh, an asteroid 300 million miles from Earth, [has a dinky little moon](#), NASA scientists said. The asteroid is roughly a half-mile across, while the (unnamed) moon is about a tenth of a mile in diameter, according to photos snapped by a spacecraft during a flyby Wednesday.

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